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The CIA: Chile and elsewhere

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Is it not high time that the United States Government, Congress, and people drew some operative conclusions from the repeated and embarrassing public predicaments in which the CIA has involved them over the past 15 years?

The most recent debate on the subject arises from the avowal by the director of the agency that it did expend considerable sums in Chile to prevent Allende's accession to power and, after he had nevertheless acceded, to weaken or undermine him.

I have not had an opportunity to examine the record sufficiently to judge whether, as claimed, other witnesses misled congressional committees on this point, though there certainly is prima facie evidence that they were not wholly candid. I should myself, however, support the U.S. Government's contention that, whatever the CIA may or may not have done in Chile, it did not "overthrow" Allende.

Allende was overthrown by Chileans. He never at any time had the support of the majority of the people. He was overthrown because he and his more radical adherents alienated, frightened, and ultimately radicalized in the opposite sense the unconverted majority, particularly its most powerful element, the military.

It is necessary to make this point in order to clarify the broad issue — whether admitted CIA activities in Chile, even if they played no substantial part in the overthrow of Allende, were in the national interest of the U.S. I would argue that they were not.

American and other Western spokesmen have for the past half century been pointing out that, while the Marxist revolutions in the Soviet Union and elsewhere were no doubt directed to noble ends, the atrocious means so often employed grossly distorted and even vitiated those ends. Yet since the onset of the cold war the U.S. has taken a leaf out of the Communist book and too often resorted to means so shabby we dare not avow them. In the long run this does not pay.

Ignoble means debase and demoralize the actors, corrupt and brutalize those acted upon and, in so doing, transform and disintegrate the end itself. This is as true for democrats as for Communists.

The consequence of a quarter century of "dirty tricks" by the CIA, that is, the U.S. Government, has been to make the agency throughout the world a symbol for unscrupulous intervention in other people's internal affairs and hence often to undermine, rather than to serve, the objectives of U.S. foreign policy.

We see how it is almost universally believed in Greece that the CIA inspired the July 15 coup in Cyprus which set in train the subsequent disasters. I believe this is a mistaken judgment, because upsetting the status quo was so obviously counter to U.S. interest. But the fact it is plausible to suppose that the CIA might have inspired the coup if it had been in the U.S. interest lends color to the accusation.

A New York Times story last week quotes a telegram from the U.S. Ambassador in Delhi to the effect that the recent revelations about CIA activities in Chile have confirmed the worst suspicions of the Indians about that agency and caused Indira Gandhi to wonder whether the Indian Government may not be the next target for elimination. This is hardly the image of its foreign policy and practice the U.S. Government should wish to see widely held around the world.

Supporters of CIA activities of this kind think of themselves as "hard-nosed" realists. The Bay of Pigs is one instructive example and Gordon Liddy's little operation at Watergate is another.

The fact is the "dirty tricks" conducted by agents of the U.S. Government very rarely serve the national interest of the United States, even if one interprets these interests in strictly "cold-war" terms. Experience has shown that they cannot be adequately "controlled" within the executive branch, because it is so often the controllers, as in the case of the Bay of Pigs and perhaps of Chile, whose perceptions and judgments are at fault.

Vietnam has tragically demonstrated the limitation on the capacity of the U.S. to determine the structure of an alien society even by a massive injection of armed force. How much less likely that America could hope to do so by clandestine operations. The U.S. can, no doubt, occasionally contribute to the rise or fall of a particular government or politician, but over the longer run indigenous forces, which it cannot control, will deter-

mine whether this superficial change has any lasting effect.

In referring at a public meeting in Washington last week to proposals that CIA abandon its covert action programs, director William Colby said: "In light of current American policy, it would not have a major impact on our current activities or the current security of the United States."

While the triple use of the word "current" is ominous, this statement is mildly reassuring. It is to be hoped that the President and Secretary of State will be persuaded that, in the broader perspective, these "dirty tricks" do more harm than good to the national security and should be phased out.

00737